

# DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 30 No. 11

November 15, 1962

Whole No. 362

## Author and Artist of the Street & Smith Staff

By J. Edward Leithead

(continued from last issue)

Foster did his usual fine job—detective or Western, it didn't matter—when assigned to do some Rough Riders. He wrote the following for this weekly that should have had much longer life (Question: could he, given a free hand for six months, have turned the tide for Rough Rider Weekly with his excellent cowboy stuff, as he did for Ace-High with Homer Stillson stories later? Answer: this was 1906-07, THAT was 1923, and at the later period readers were more inclined to see the cowboy "in all his glory", the puncher had become popular in the interim—anyway, in that earlier time, Bert Foster was slated for first honors with the Buffalo Bill Stories, and am I glad he wrote THEM!). Here's his Rough Rider out-put:

Rough Rider Weekly Nos. 119, 120, 124, 125, 126, 127, 130, 131, 133, 158, 160, 161, 162, 163 170 171 172, 173, 174, 175.

And here is a short sample of what Foster could do with a Rough Rider tale, No. 170, King of the Wild West's Cattle War, or, Stella's Bout With the Rival Ranchers:

"Stella (Fosdick) darting forward, picked up the branding iron and sprang upon the helpless steer. Ted posted himself in front of the steer. The rustlers were at a disadvantage for a moment . . . Caught in a criminal deed as they had been (brand-blotting), Ted Strong and his girl pard must not be



W. Bert Foster

left to bear evidence against them.

"Who the blazes are you?" demanded the leader. A senseless question for every man at Tin Cup knew Ted Strong pretty well by that time.

"I am the owner of this steer," returned Ted, "this steer that you are trying to steal."

" . . . Ted landed a blow that sent the leader of the rustlers heels over head. He was dazed and helpless for an instant. That instant was Ted's opportunity. He made a dive for the prostrate man, stopped over him, jerked at his belt buckle, gave his body a swift



heave to one side, and arose with the belt and its dangling revolvers. Throwing the belt behind him, Ted drew his own weapons."

Mrs. John H. Whitson, wife of the Street & Smith author, once wrote me that her husband had written the Bowery Boy Library tales from No. 76 through 83. W. Bert Foster took them from there, No. 84, Bowery Billy's Decoration, or, A Mystery of the French Quarter, to the not-far-off finish, No. 100. He did some good ones, particularly No. 87, Bowery Billy on the East Side Roofs and No. 99, Bowery Billy's Coney Island Jaunt. Foster could handle Bowery slang (as well as good English) better than some, and his Bowery Billys were the best in that weekly of not very long life. He even wrote some above No. 84, for in No. 55, Bowery Billy's Bag of Gold, is this identifying sentence, "You're looking as chipper as a Piegan squaw with a string of glass beads." He put those very words into the mouth of Old Nick Nomad in several of his tales for the Buffalo Bill Stories.

The following is from No. 94, Bowery Billy's Spanish Case, or, Exposing the Carlist Plotters, interesting not only as an example of Foster's work for this library devoted to the adventures of a street Arab turned boy detective, but for the reference to Ted Strong and his Rough Riders whom many a boy reader of that golden time of youth really believed existed out West at Moon Valley Ranch, S. D.:

"At night these Coney Island parks, with their countless colored lights, the gaily painted kiosks, the movement and coloring and life, all go to make up a picture easily imagined to be Oriental or fairylike. No Eastern city—not even far-famed Benares—could be more brilliant than these scenes at the greatest amusement resort in the world.

"Billy (Barlow) and Thede (Marston) wandered on with the crowd, passed other crowds sitting down, within hearing of the tinkle of falling waters, and almost dazzled by all manner of tawdry display.

"... The 'big show' in the park was a Wild West entertainment, in which there were cowboys, cowgirls, an old-fashioned stagecoach and plenty of wiry-looking broncos."

One of the horses goes hog-wild and Phil Erwin, Bowery Billy's friend from the West, gives a fine exhibition of cowboy horsemanship. Some of the riders in the Wild West show comment upon it:

"I tell yuh what, fellers,' drawled a young fellow who was rolling himself a cigarette and sitting sideways in his own saddle. 'Yuh don't see such ridin' as that often.'

"That's right, yuh don't, Monty.'

"It would take Ted Strong or some of his rough riders ter beat that, heh?" declared he of the cigarette. 'Hi, hi, yip! Hang ter him, pardner!'

In the declining days of Diamond Dick, Jr. Weekly, Foster wrote a series of nine super tales about Dick and

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Handsome Harry in the Klondike, beginning with No. 739, Diamond Dick's Trail to Nome, continuing through 740 to 747; he followed these with six stories laid in the Southwest, No. 748, Diamond Dick and the Barrilla Apaches, through 753, Diamond Dick in the Line of Duty. Nine issues later, Diamond Dick, Jr. ceased publication with No. 762, dated May 20, 1911.

In the publishers' announcement of the weekly's termination, readers were referred to the Buffalo Bill Stories as "larger and better." Foster didn't have to worry, although by that time he had stopped writing Buffalo Bills, which had reached No. 523, Buffalo Bill's Pueblo Foes, by John H. Whitson—Foster was then doing stories for Street & Smith's pulp magazines, mostly serials, and some of these were later re-issued in hard-cover editions when S. & S. launched into that end of the publishing business, these editions selling anywhere from 75 cents to \$2.00, and worth the price. Among the titles that had book publication, were "Island Ranch," "The House of Disappearances," "The Great Radio Mystery" and "The Crime at Red Towers"; but none were under his own name and I've never known what the noms. were.

Nearly all of Foster's later writings were done for the Clayton group of magazines, as there was a five year period when he was tied up there by an agreement. So was I. I'd sold my first story to Western Story Magazine—it was a Larry Ordway story, "A Buckskin Bargain." I was to write a dozen Larry Ordway stories altogether (my grandson is named for him), ranging from 2 or 3 shorts to 2 and 3 part stories, to one complete novel and 4 six-part serials, which went into pocket editions. The meaning of this is that Ace-High readers took to Ordway and his partner, Old Bill Randle, but I wouldn't mention it here except that it has to do with my friend Foster. Bert Foster liked my cowboy characters just as I liked his, and he thought it would be a fine idea to bring Homer Stillson, Poke Fellows, Larry Ordway and Old Bill Randle

together in a serial on which we would collaborate. The editor and the publisher also thought it a fine idea, and naturally, so did I.

But tragedy intervened before we could work out a plot involving all four cowboys. Sometime after I had got to know him, I forget how long, Foster's eyes had given him renewed and serious trouble, though just how serious he was not told at first. Blindness threatened. He put up a game struggle (he had a heart ailment, too), dictating stories to his wife when he could no longer see to do it himself . . . I remember that his last, or one of his last, novels for Ranch Romances was "Cherokee Rose."

Mrs. Foster continued writing, as she had been doing, under her maiden name, Myrtle Juliette Corey. Some of her later Ranch Romances novels were done in collaboration with Austin Corcoran, a product of the Western Slope of the Rockies, a cowboy and a ranch owner of many years' standing. He was for a long time a champion bucking horse rider and calf-roper. Early in his career he did special articles for the Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine. Myrtle Foster herself was a good rider and seldom missed a rodeo at the Madison Square Garden. I have a photo of her taken in a ten-gallon hat.

It seems to me appropriate to end this sketch of W. Bert Foster with one of the letters his wife wrote me from out West after his death, where she was "trying to see as much as possible of real Western life and backgrounds"—strangely, I have no letter from him, but then I was in New York so often in those days and saw him, that there was no good reason to write:

(Mrs. Foster's letter)

Mike Kirk Trading Post,  
Manuelito, New Mexico.

Dec. 15, 1935.

"Dear Mr. Leithead:

Just sent you by registered mail two photos, one of Mr. Foster and one of myself . . .

"I am inclined to agree with you in opinion regarding which of my husband's writings you prefer. To me those have always held the most in-



terest . . . (Foster's novels for Street & Smith's 5c weeklies and his Ace-High Magazine Western novels and serials under his own name and pseudonym "John Boyd Clark") . . .

"In my files in New York I have some entertaining letters received by Mr. Foster from Major Lillie. We often talked over his 'Buffalo Bill' yarns and he surely took great enjoyment from the writing of them.

"I cannot say much for either the paper or the ribbon, purchased at local store, and it is to be hoped that the supplies ordered from New York arrive before I must copy my novel! I hope you can decipher this!

"This climate is far preferable to that of the Eastern Seaboard, but it is cold at night and early morning. Then I can assure you that a good cedarwood fire is most cheering. I am greatly enjoying the experience and getting new background and fresh stimulus from it.

"Thanks for the very nice letter, and with very best wishes for yourself and family for this Holiday Season,

Sincerely yours,  
(Signed) Myrtle Foster."

## PART II

### The Artist: Charles L. Wrenn

He was a slender man of average height, with a close-cropped mustache, and I met him first in the Clayton Magazine offices. At that time he was painting all the covers for Ranch Romances—two a month—and he continued to do them when Fanny Louise Ellsworth, editor, and her highly successful romantic Western magazine transferred to the Warner Publications office (I went along, too, by the way).

It seems amazing that I should know, in 1923 and later, two men who had contributed so much to my boyhood (lifelong, really) fondness for dime novels and, almost as much as the stories themselves, the brilliant colored covers. For Charles L. Wrenn was one of the outstanding artists of the Street & Smith Art Department. A lot of his covers adorned the novels that Foster wrote—what a combination!

Over a long period Wrenn's work

appeared as thrilling cover illustrations for the Buffalo Bill Stories, New Nick Carter Weekly, Tip Top Weekly, Diamond Dick, Jr. Weekly, Rough Rider, Bowery Boy, Brave and Bold, Might and Main. He also did many covers for New Tip Top, Nick Carter Stories and New Buffalo Bill Weekly, and for Street & Smith's big line of 15c book type novels.

Charles Wrenn graduated from Princeton in 1903, and at that time was not just sure what he wanted to do. He had been drawing for the Princeton Tiger, and on the advice of a friend, Wilford Conrow, spent the summer of his junior year at the New York Art School, studying under Kenneth H. Miller and Louis Mora. The summer after graduation he returned to his art studies, but this time entered the Art Students' League.

Here he worked for about six months, then got a job as artist on the Newark Advertiser. It was the first time the paper had had an art department. Unfortunately, it lasted only about a year, and Wrenn and his boss, Dare Cook, started one of the very first Commercial Art Services in Newark, in an old loft building opposite the C. C. R. of N. J. depot. Here they worked for a couple of years. Several evenings each week they conducted an art school in an office. The only member Wrenn now recalls was Gus Mangier, afterward a successful cartoonist. The Art Service was eventually discontinued and Wrenn returned to the League for further study.

Engaged to marry a Miss Helen Bourne, of Cranford, N. J., and being without the necessary funds for marriage, Wrenn sought employment in the Art Department of Street & Smith, under the direction of William Heines.

"Here," Wrenn wrote me, replying to my request for facts of his interesting career, "began my thrilling and blood-curdling adventures with the 5c weeklies."

There were two other artists, besides the lettering man. One of the former was Marmaduke Russell, an Englishman who had aspirations to be a portrait of beautiful women for maga-



zine covers, and spent his in-between moments drawing innumerable handsome English girl heads. It was a complete relaxation from the exciting exploits of Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill, etc. (That's one identifying mark of Russell's pictures, the very pretty girls he drew—Stella Fosdick of Rough Rider was one of them, Belle Bellair of Diamond Dick another).

The other artist was Ed. Johnson, a heavy-set, handsome fellow who had been a professional pugilist in his earlier days, and then capitalized this knowledge as staff artist on the Police Gazette, doing the fight stuff. Johnson was a most interesting character, making landscape printing and the violin his hobbies.

"I can still see him sitting at his desk," Wrenn said, "with several unfinished Buffalo Bill or Nick Carter drawings, fiddling on his arm with a large ruler and completely wrapped up in his silent music."

Following Russell's departure from the department, a Mr. J. A. Carter joined their group. Mr. Illers was the lettering man, hammering out the thrilling titles for many years, when he was succeeded by a Mr. James, a young artist friend of Mr. Wrenn's from Arizona. James did the usual titles, besides headings for other Street & Smith magazines, Popular, etc. He was made Art Director of S. & S. following the death of Mr. Heines.

There is one artist Wrenn doesn't mention who did work for Street & Smith at that time, whether or not he worked in the office every day. That was J. A. Cahill, who did covers and headings for Smith's Magazine (on the order of old Munsey's), but he also drew covers for New Nick Carter Weekly, Nos. 558 to 649 without a break (and dandies!); also, at least one and probably more New Magnet covers which might be termed "stock" or "standard," because used so many times: a picture of Nick and Chick Carter, the chief seated, examining a document with a large magnifying glass and Chick leaning over a little to see. The name "J. A. Cahill" is plain enough in the lower corner. He

didn't sign his drawings in Nick Carter Weekly, nor did he do covers for any of the other 5c weeklies. Although intended originally for Nick Carters, this New Magnet cover was also used on Harrison Keiths—well, you could think of them as Harry Keith and his first assistant, Dick Rogers, I suppose.

Mr. Heines, the art director, used to hand Mr. Wrenn and his associates mss. for Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, the Merriwells, Bowery Boy, etc., which they would skim through, or if they became interested (as they often did) read to a finish, thus getting behind schedule; pick out a thrilling scene, sketch it roughly, show it to Mr. Heines, then go to work on the drawing. Sometimes under pressure they were given a short, typed synopsis of a scene. Most of them turned out from four to six of these drawings each week. The drawings were done in pen and ink, the proof then colored by the artists, and sent in to the Ben Day color department, where the Jacobus Brothers made the color plates. Each week a large proof sheet was brought to Wrenn and his associates for their inspection and criticism. The heads of the organization took these 5c novels very seriously, as at that time they were great money makers.

"I recall one incident," wrote Mr. Wrenn amusedly, "which almost wrecked my career. I had informed Mr. Heines that I was to be married in the following October, two months off, when a sheet of Diamond Dick covers was brought in. The whole firm was in a great stew. In coloring one of the proofs I had made an unpardonable error. The scene was from Diamond Dick and the Black Spider, something like that, and I had painted the spider yellow! Mr. Heines and Messrs. George and Ormond Smith, the big bosses, were in a state. The magazines were on the press. Presses stopped, the color department puzzling how to turn yellow to black. I was about to be fired, my job and marriage about to go up in yellow smoke! Then the Jacobus Brothers hit on a method of turning the yellow into near-black by



applying green. All was saved and I am still married to Helen Bourne.

"Mr. Gilbert Patten (Burt L. Standish) was then my great admiration. He wrote the Merriwell stories, and with my college background, I took great interest in doing my best with these heroes. Mr. Patten and I still see each other over a glass at Lee Chumley's in the Village (this was in 1935) and go over those early days."

In an earlier and briefer sketch of Mr. Wrenn I did not state that identification of the novel cover was not made without a bit of looking into. Wrenn's letter said it was "Diamond Dick and the Black Spider, something like that," but I knew of no such title on the Diamond Dick list. Nearest was "Nick Carter and the Yellow Spider's Web" (N. C. Weekly No. 356), but "yellow" for the spider was the wrong color and there wasn't any spider on the N. C. cover anyway. Finally I hit it—"Buffalo Bill and the Creeping Terror, or, The Black Spider of the Shoshones" (B. Bill Stories No. 289). The scene was Buffalo Bill clinging to the limb of a tree at the edge of a precipice, with a rather smeary-looking green-black spider, really a dressed-up Indian, blocking Cody's chance to save himself from the yawning abyss. I sent Wrenn a description of this, with the Buffalo Bill title and sub-title, and here is his reply:

Two Two Two West One One  
New York City  
Dec. 11, 1935.

"Dear Mr. Leithead:

I am very glad my data is helpful.

You are probably correct about the Spider. It has been so long since that tragedy that I could not be certain whether it was Buffalo or Diamond. But the smeared green-black spider sounds most probable. The more I think of it the more certain I am that you have solved the mystery. I colored it yellow and then they slapped

green on it to make it black.

"I will enjoy the covers, I know. Many thanks.

Most sincerely,

(Signed) Charles L. Wrenn."

I had asked him if he wouldn't like to have a few of the novels for which he'd drawn the covers, and I sent him one or two of each, including Tip Top, for which he had done quite a few (including covers for Merriwells reprinted in New Medal—J. A. Carter did a lot of covers for the 15c Merriwell Series, etc.). A sketch of him, from the data he had sent me, was published in Ralph Smith's Happy Hours Magazine for March-April 1936, and a copy or two of this issue went along with the novels. Mr. Wrenn wrote me:

Two Two Two West One One  
New York City  
March 29, 1936.

"Dear Mr. Leithead:

I think you did a fine job with my 'career.' It looked very important in print.

"Also many thanks for the old numbers of the S. & S. weeklies. They have given my friends a great deal of amusement.

"Strangely enough I had a phone from the Bell Syndicate a few months ago, wanting me to make some illustrations for Frank Merriwell stories which they are syndicating in about 24 papers, including the New York Post. I have done three installments so far and hope they will continue. So you see this has been rather an anniversary year.

Most cordially yours,

(Signed) Charles L. Wrenn."

Through lack of information it is, unfortunately, not possible for me to name those artists who drew the earliest covers of the Buffalo Bill Stories, but Charles L. Wrenn started doing them in 1906 with Nos. 268 through 280—good start, a string of 13; he

#### MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 232. Forret Campbell 5868 Pilgrim St., Kalamazoo, Mich. (New Member)
- 233. J. F. Thevenon, 127 Ave. Parmentier, Paris II, France (New Member)
- 234. Albert E. Johnson, 289 San Antonio Way, Sacramento 19, Calif. (Old Member)



joined up a little ahead of Bert Foster, drew the cover for Foster's first Buffalo Bill tale, No. 282, Buffalo Bill's Camp-fires, or, The Bad Man of Snake River Crossing—284 through 289 (the Black Spider issue), 291, 294, 298 through 301, 304 through 317, 319 through 328, 331 through 339, 342, 343, 346 through 349, 351, 352, 353, 355, 356, 358, 359, 361, 362, 363, 366, 369, 371, 372, 374, 376, 378, 379, 381, 382, 384, 385, 386, 389, 390, 393, 394, 396, 398, 399, 400, 403, 404, 405, 408, 409, 411 through 414, 416, 417, 419 through 424, 426, 429 through 432, 434 through 442, 444, 445, 447 through 455, 457, 458, 460, through 477, 479, 481 through 487, 489, 491, 492, 494 through 500, 502 through 509, 511, 512, 514 through 518, 521 through 532, 535, 536, 538 through 542, 548 through 550, 553 through 568, 570 through 588, 590.

(To be continued)

## WANTED

Buffalo Bill Stories, #2 3 4 6 7 26  
34 39 80 89 137 148 153 157 164 171  
173 183 200 203 206 211 239 256 258  
265 319 390 541 543 554 569 and 588.

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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

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87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

Editor, Edward T. LeBlanc,

87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

Managing Editor, Edward T. LeBlanc,

87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

Business Mgr., Edward T. LeBlanc,

87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

2. The owner is: (if owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.)

Edward T. LeBlanc,

87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state)

None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue sold or distributed through the mails or otherwise to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required by the act of June 11, 1960, to be included in all statements regardless of frequency of issue):

225.

Signed

**Edward T. LeBlanc**

**Editor**

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18th day of September 1962

C. H. Camille Whitehead

(My commission expires May 10, 1969)

**NOVELS — SETS — VOLUMES — RARE DIME NOVELS**

- Beadle's Boys' Library (Ivers edition). #1 to 64, (lacking #2) bound in two volumes, some issues have extra colored covers. Many rare old western novels in this series. The set, two volumes, \$40
- Bowery Boy Library #1 to 100. Complete set. Good. \$100.00.
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- Singles—Bowery Boy, \$1.25 each. Motor Stories, 75c each.
- Tip Top Weekly (original issue of Merriwell novels). Price 60c to \$2.50 each, for good copies. Send \$3.00 for 5 different.
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